

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, March 22, 2022
Virtual

EAC members present –D. Beane, C. Curran-Myers, S. Crothers, W. Vitale

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, S. Bachman, D. Nazario, S. Harrity

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the February 22, 2022 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Mr. Beane stated that he is waiting to hear back about interest in holding a walk in Hessian Camp.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the College Heights walk will be on Saturday, April 2 at 10 am, meeting at Oak Lane and Lorraine Rd. She stated that the walk will last approximately 30 minutes and will be for 4 – 5 blocks. She stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is preparing some handouts. She stated that the MP3 is aware that the walk is occurring and has been invited to attend. She stated that she is now a member of the MP3 Land and Environmental Committee.

Mr. Beane stated that he will follow up with Hessian Camp leadership and recommend holding their walk in late April or early May.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she met with Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Harrity and Mr. Zeiber about yard waste removal.

Mr. Harrity stated that the regular yard waste pick up schedule will resume on March 28.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if Ms. Crothers has an update on bag donations.

Ms. Crothers stated that Weaver's Hardware will be donating ten packs of five bags for a total of 50 bags. She stated that she is picking them up this Friday.

Mr. Vitale suggested having a logo stamp made to add the EAC logo and the proper phone number to call to arrange for pick up.

Ms. Crothers suggested that the bags be provided to those attending the College Heights walk. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will provide bags from home for this walk.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the bags be given to those in greater need. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed. Mr. Beane expressed the belief that Hessian Camp residents won't need donated bags either.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested having bags available at community gardens and for pick up at City Hall.

Ms. Crothers questioned if there is a flyer about the collection program. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is currently creating a flyer. She also reviewed the installation of signage that Public Works will be creating.

Mr. Beane suggested that the Pendora neighborhood be included in the Hessian Camp walk.

Mr. Vitale suggested targeting specific locations with these first 50 bags to raise awareness of the program.

Mr. Nazario questioned how the walk on April 2 was advertised and integrated with other suggested programming. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the event hasn't been advertised except through the MP3 and College Heights Community Council.

Mr. Vitale suggested providing the donated bags where there is no regular yard waste pick up.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she missed the last Oakbrook Community Garden meeting but believes that this neighborhood will also be interested in a walk.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that Mr. Nazario has indicated that he has several people interested in becoming EAC members and she is waiting to receive their applications. She questioned if there has been any contact by Ms. Noviello.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has had no contact with Ms. Noviello. She stated that she will contact her one last time to indicate that her unresponsiveness has triggered the need for Council to remove her as a member at this time so that another person can be appointed.

Mr. Beane stated that Ms. Noviello also has the option of serving on one of the EAC committees.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane stated that he has no report.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Mr. Beane stated that Liberty Environmental has begun hiring interns for this summer and much of their time will be devoted to this project. He noted his hope that work would be completed by mid-summer.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned what the project would entail. Mr. Beane stated that site profiles will be completed. He stated that this project also relates to the brownfields water hook-up issue. He stated that impacted parcels need to be identified.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this project would assist the City with its environmental justice issues. She noted the need to identify contaminated parcels and any land use restrictions.

Mr. Beane agreed that this is very much needed. He noted the need to ensure covenants are included on deeds.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that currently the information is scattered and that this database will make access to the information easier for the public to find.

Mr. Nazario questioned if Rev. Morrison has been contacted yet. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has not contacted Rev. Morrison.

Mr. Nazario expressed the belief that Ms. Curran-Myers has inferred that Rev. Morrison's information was incorrect in the past. He noted the need for education and to allow the community to be a resource. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Rev. Morrison has been engaged in the past. She stated that Mr. Beane is an expert in this area and is involved with many of these types of redevelopment projects.

Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Beane stated that he worked with Rev. Morrison regarding her concerns at the Buttonwood Gateway. He explained that this location contained a radioactive slag pile from the 1950's and 1960's. He stated that extensive cleanup was done and the contaminated soil has been capped. He stated that the development is not occurring near the capped slag pile. He stated that he appreciated Rev. Morrison's involvement in bringing these concerns to the EAC. He noted the need to understand that the Act 2 process is not a rubber stamping process and that many professionals review the information and work to protect the public.

(Note: During a Smart Growth Alliance meeting on March 23, the project developer described the work, funding, and time that was committed to moving the Buttonwood Gateway project site from commercial use to residential use. Both soil and water were addressed and now meet the necessary standards.)

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that working with community members is important to take new and additional information learned back to the community. She noted that Rev. Morrison is welcome to attend meetings.

Mr. Nazario spoke about equity versus equality and noted the need for Rev. Morrison to be specifically invited to the meetings. *(Note: Mr. Nazario provided Rev. Morrison's email to Ms. Smith via email.)*

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the interns are working to bring the information together. She stated that the EAC understands the community's need for this information and to make sure that the City is paying attention to these problem sites. She stated that there is perception and there is data.

Mr. Nazario expressed the belief that the EAC has concluded that there is no problem. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is not correct. She stated that there is a need for this database and it is being compiled for easy use.

Mr. Nazario noted the need for Rev. Morrison to be involved in the process. Mr. Vitale stated that this is a newer topic for the EAC and Mr. Nazario's points are well taken.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that the database will always be incomplete because new sites are continuously located by real estate development at locations that have not been tested before.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this whole effort is to identify as many sites as possible.

Ms. Sellers apologized for joining late. She questioned who would be compiling the information. Mr. Beane stated that the summer interns at Liberty Environmental will be compiling the information.

Ms. Sellers questioned where the interns will be getting the information. Mr. Beane stated that multiple sources are available and that Liberty Environmental was involved in many projects at these sites. He stated that information is also available from DEP, the City and the County. He stated that when Ms. Smith receives a notification letter the site can be added to the database and additional research can begin.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the City's Codes offices should have much of this information. He stated that typically these sites are identified by triggers during development or redevelopment. He stated that step one of the project is gathering the information that is already known. He stated that it would be difficult and very expensive to test every property in Reading. He noted the need to target suspected sites or specific areas.

Mr. Beane stated that most sites are generally former commercial uses. He stated that Rev. Morrison is concerned that a former commercial area will be used to build homes. He stated that this is the type of project that has the most impact to the community.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that former farms and orchards can also be problematic. Mr. Beane stated that Reading's last farm is no longer active and has been sold. Mr. Vitale stated that the site will become a church.

Ms. Sellers questioned other concerning sites. Mr. Beane stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers are working with Liberty Environmental to get started. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that once there is an understanding of what information is available, the need to research other sites can begin.

Ms. Sellers questioned who pays for Phase one testing. Mr. Beane stated that these costs are incurred by developers. He stated that DEP issues a final letter that includes land use restrictions and future limitations. He stated that many times the letter is put aside and forgotten.

Ms. Sellers questioned if DEP draws information from a national program. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the national program is superfund sites and that information cannot be shared. She stated that DEP ensures that safety standards are met or that uses are restricted.

Ms. Sellers questioned the best place to gather the information.

Mr. Vitale explained that DEP is regulatory. He stated that testing information is submitted by consultants who are working on a future project.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Phase one is a file search; Phase two is a soil study.

Mr. Beane stated that this is a voluntary program. He stated that when DEP learns about projects it orders remediation. He stated that they do not take an active role in testing.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that City processes require studies.

Mr. Beane explained that DEP can approve limited remediation but that will restrict future uses. He stated that a full release allows all future uses.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the use of public funds for projects also requires studies. He stated that he was involved in studies for several large projects.

Mr. Beane agreed and stated that banks will not provide loans for projects on sites that may have environmental problems.

Mr. Beane stated that he will have more detail on the project at the next meeting.

Mr. Nazario questioned where Liberty Environmental acquires its interns. Mr. Beane stated that they are generally college students interested in environmental or engineering fields.

Mr. Nazario suggested that Liberty Environmental focus on Reading natives as interns. He expressed the belief that many Reading residents are not exposed to these types of careers. Mr. Beane stated that this is a great idea and he will follow up with Liberty Environmental.

Mr. Nazario noted the need to purposely select Reading residents.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Mr. Nazario stated that the meeting yesterday was great. He noted the need to be intentional in engaging the community and to have a simple plan that is manageable and sustainable. He stated that 8 – 9 events per year were recommended including events held in coordination with the book club at the Reading Public Library, Café Esperanza and Goggleworks (both in the theater and in the garden).

Mr. Nazario stated that in addition to education, the events could be used to collect emails and gather volunteers. He noted the need for a call to action. He stated that the draft event plan is not meant to be difficult for the EAC members to plan and sustain.

Mr. Nazario stated that social media posts will be made about upcoming events and pictures taken during the events, along with environmental education. He noted the need to share event information with local media platforms including those that are minority owned.

Mr. Nazario stated that Ms. Chesson is preparing the EAC Facebook and Instagram pages and is designing graphics and posts. He stated that building community engagement is long term work and needs to happen where people are already gathering. He noted the need to grow new leaders.

Mr. Nazario stated that the draft plan begins in April and can be planned out as needed. He suggested that EAC members attend training to better interact with

one another and with the community. He noted the need to teach the community how to access and how to connect with nature.

Mr. Vitale requested that Ms. Smith share Ms. Chesson's and Mr. Nazario's Power Point Presentation with the full EAC. Ms. Smith shared the presentation during the meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the presentation contains the framework of the draft plan.

Mr. Vitale agreed with the need to develop a contact list to share information with the wider community. He stated that Ms. Chesson is also willing to create the green infrastructure map. He noted his hope that the map would contain a broad range of projects. He stated that he felt good after yesterday's meeting and that there was great discussion.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the draft plan is comprehensive and is a very good starting point. He stated that the EAC is moving forward toward its goals. He noted the need to determine work assignments and noted the need for EAC members to remain engaged in the process.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she would be glad to have new people involved.

Mr. Nazario suggested that Ms. Curran-Myers mentor a new leader. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she would serve as a mentor. She noted the need for new people to become engaged who want to become leaders.

Mr. Vitale stated that he is also willing to serve as a mentor.

Mr. Nazario stated that he and Ms. Chesson are also working to identify young people to step forward.

Mr. Beane stated that he is also willing to serve as a mentor.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Chesson indicated during a recent Green Infrastructure Committee meeting that she can create the map. She stated that site coordinates need to be sent to Ms. Chesson along with information and photos. She noted the need to discuss this in more detail at the next committee meeting to determine who will collect the data.

Ms. Sellers suggested that the community be invited to submit their projects. Mr. Nazario agreed with this approach. He stated that this will engage the community from the beginning of the process.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the project is just beginning now.

Mr. Vitale agreed that this should be discussed at the next meeting. He noted the need to determine what projects to include on the map.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith suggested that Ms. Chesson post on social media for people to send their information to be included on the map. Mr. Nazario stated that he liked this approach.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that people send photos of their rain barrels. Mr. Vitale agreed. He stated that people are resourceful and are already using green infrastructure, even if they don't realize it.

ELECTRICITY AGREEMENT

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a new agreement is needed because the current provider will not be renewing. She stated that she is currently working with the City's Finance Director to determine if a consultant can assist in the process. She noted the need for a quick turn-around once the prices are submitted to the City.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is being determined if a bid process is needed or if there are providers through the State Co-Stars program. She stated that this will be determined by mid-May. She stated that she will discuss the structure of the contract with the EAC. She stated that the current contract is 100% fossil free with 50% renewable and 50% nuclear. She noted her hope to increase the renewable energy within the next several years. She explained that the nuclear power is produced locally and that energy credits may also be available.

WWTP ENERGY AUDIT

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that building benchmarks have begun to be compiled and three years of data will be included. She stated that the WWTP energy audit will begin in April. She stated that SSM has been hired and will be on site for one week collecting data.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Hoag attend the May meeting to provide a report on the WWTP energy audit. Ms. Smith stated that she will work to schedule Ms. Hoag's attendance.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that after the benchmarks are completed, weatherization and LED lighting will be considered for City-owned buildings. She stated that it is hoped that buildings become more efficient.

ELECTRICITY AGREEMENT (continued)

Mr. Vitale suggested that the agreement remain 50% renewable and 50% nuclear. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the goal is to increase renewables in the next agreement as the cost of renewables is reduced.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Senator Schwank is sponsoring legislation for homeowners to weatherize their properties.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that in approximately 2007 DEP started a program to weatherize schools. She stated that the program was very successful and saved Districts approximately 50% in energy costs.

Ms. Sellers questioned if there is a federal program to install solar panels. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is a rebate program requiring property owners to have the funding upfront, which many are unable to do. She stated that Senator Schwank's legislation would create both a grant program and revolving fund to get the funding before the project begins.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that revolving funds work well. She stated that they are generally 0% interest and are better than grants because they generate continuous funds to be used by others, rather than grant funds that are given away only one time.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the program would be established with ARPA funds. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is unsure but stated that it may also use Infrastructure funds.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if a bill number had been assigned. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is SB1135.

Mr. Vitale stated that property owners need to move to clean energy but how to facilitate that is difficult. He agreed that people need assistance and noted the need to get this type of information to the public.

Mr. Vitale questioned if Public Works is still exploring a solar project. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is. She stated that financing for the project and project implementation is being studied. She noted the need for the best usage of the energy. She stated that there are legal issues with electricity production that also need to be researched.

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Smith and Mr. Bachman are updating the inventory of green infrastructure projects. She requested that others provide project information to them to add to the inventory.

Mr. Bachman stated that he will also be adding projects that have received NPDES permits.

Ms. Sellers questioned progress on the signage. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the sign language is being finalized. She stated that an RFP will be issued by the beginning of May. She stated that she is working to identify other sites that need signage to reduce the cost per sign. She stated that the cost of materials has increased and that her budget will pay for the signage installation. She noted her hope that signs will begin to be installed this summer.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she and Ms. Sellers are working on the required application forms. She requested Mr. Bachman's assistance with the City locations. Mr. Bachman stated that he is willing to assist.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Smith will schedule a meeting via Zoom.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Ms. Smith stated that the BCCD has indicated that a new urban agriculture coordinator is being hired and will be introduced in the near future.

RECYCLING CARTS

Mr. Harrity stated that approximately 400 carts have been distributed recently and an additional 400 carts will be distributed shortly. He noted his hope that each property will have a cart.

All noted Mr. Harrity's great work.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date is Tuesday, April 26 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk